

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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CONTACT: Marjani Williams
Marjani.williams@illinois.gov**The Illinois Department of Central Management Services (CMS) Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Announces New Disparity Study to Assess Economic Inclusion in State Contracting Opportunities***Colette Holt & Associates Selected through Competitive Bidding Process to Lead Study*

CHICAGO – The Illinois Department of Central Management Services' (CMS) Business Enterprise Program (BEP) today announced a new disparity study, to be led by Colette Holt & Associates, that will examine the availability and utilization of businesses owned by minorities, women, veterans, and people living with disabilities on State of Illinois contracts. This study is one of the latest efforts by the State to promote the economic inclusion of historically disadvantaged businesses in accordance with State act 30 ILCS 575/4(d).

“This assessment is an important step towards furthering our goal of economic development and wealth generation for underrepresented communities,” said CMS Director Janel L. Forde. “By using the latest, most accurate data, the State can identify and help address any impediments that may prevent firms from engaging in the bidding process and provide data to support equity-based policies.”

Following a competitive bidding process, the State will be entering into exclusive negotiations with Colette Holt & Associates to conduct the disparity study for the Business Enterprise Program (BEP). State and local governments, based on constitutional law, must provide a factual basis that a disparity exists in accessing contracting opportunities as a precondition to establishing affirmative action programs. The study will provide the State with quantitative and qualitative evidence to determine the availability of ready, willing, able and qualified firms for participation in State contracts; determine if a disparity exists; and if so, determine why the disparity exists and what solutions or remedies could be implemented.

“I am eager to use quality research to inform and validate our work toward ensuring fair access and opportunity,” said Arielle Johnson, Deputy Director of the Business Enterprise Program. “In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, ‘We are faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.’ We are committed to effectively promoting equity for the disenfranchised and underrepresented who historically have had no civic voice.”

The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) was created in 1984 pursuant to the Business Enterprise for minorities, females, and persons with disabilities Program Act (30 ILCS 575). The BEP continues its efforts to increase procurement access and opportunities for disadvantaged entrepreneurs. BEP is actively working to expand the program's impact through increased

participation in state contracting opportunities, engagement and collaboration with State agencies, institutions of higher education, the BEP vendor community and other stakeholders.

Colette Holt & Associates (CHA), founded in 1994, is a national leader in conducting disparity studies that fully meet all legal and research requirements. CHA has conducted studies and participated in more than 75 studies with agencies across the country.

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